



**BUILDING INNOVATION**  
Conference

# Culture of Innovation

Are Innovators born or bred?

Nancy Novak, Chief Innovation Officer  
Amy Marks, SVP of Innovation  
Compass Datacenters



## Nancy Novak

Chief Innovation Officer

With more than 30 years of experience in the construction industry, Nancy Novak brings extensive expertise in oversight and responsibility for Profit and Loss. In her current role as Chief Innovation Officer for Compass Datacenters, her focus is cutting edge technology, lean practices, and innovative culture through diversity of thought to add value, improve return on investment, and disrupt the construction industry.



## Amy Marks

SVP of Innovation  
aka the Queen of Prefab

Amy is an SME for industrialized construction, connected data platforms, sustainability, and digital transformation. She is an alumna of Harvard Business School and graduate of the University of Florida. Amy is the ambassador & Chair of Advancing Prefabrication Conference and an international keynote speaker.





# Is innovation nature or nurture



**NATURE**



**NURTURE**

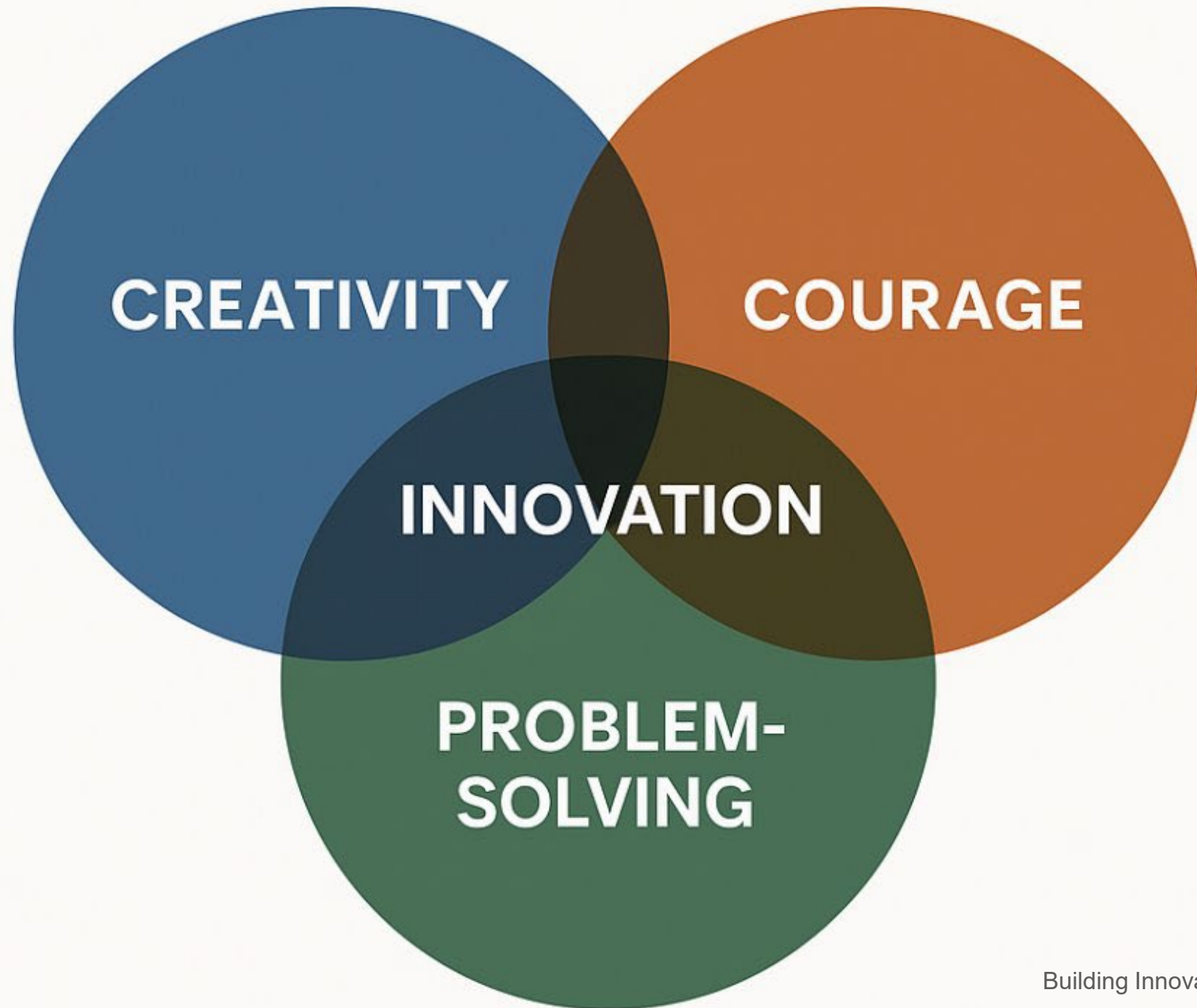
# INNOVATION

Innovation is the process of creating and successfully implementing new ideas, methods, products, or services that deliver meaningful value — whether through improvement, transformation, or disruption.



# Turning Ideas into Innovation







# Innovation in Data Centers: Why Now?



## Urgency

- AI explosion: record speed + density demands
- Grid & land scarcity
- Race to lower emissions and meet ESG goals



## Major Constraints

- Limited power & delayed connections
- Long equipment lead times
- Transitional risk – not in my backyard



## Size of the Need

- 10–15% annual demand growth
- \$100B+ AI-driven investment by 2028
- Tier 1 markets oversubscribed

# Innovation in Data Centers



 Industrialized Construction: Prefab and Modular

 Sustainability and Renewable Energy

 Water Conservation Technologies

 AI and Automation in Operations

 Advanced Cooling Technologies

 Edge Computing Innovations



# Is innovation nature or nurture



**NATURE**

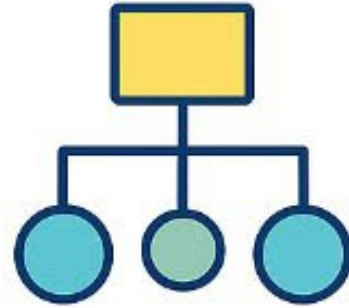


**NURTURE**

# Can Innovation Be Learned?



**Creativity  
Training  
Programs**

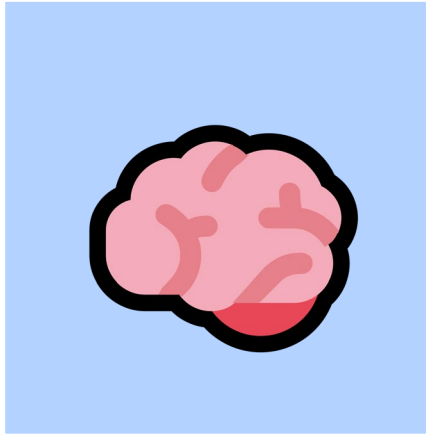


**Design  
Thinking  
Methodologies**

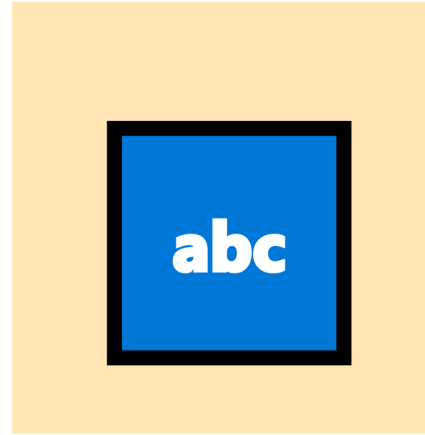


**Fostering a  
Growth  
Mindset**

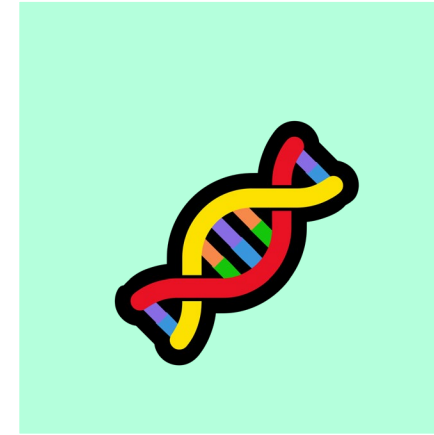
# Is Innovation Innate?



**Natural  
Problem-  
Solving Ability**

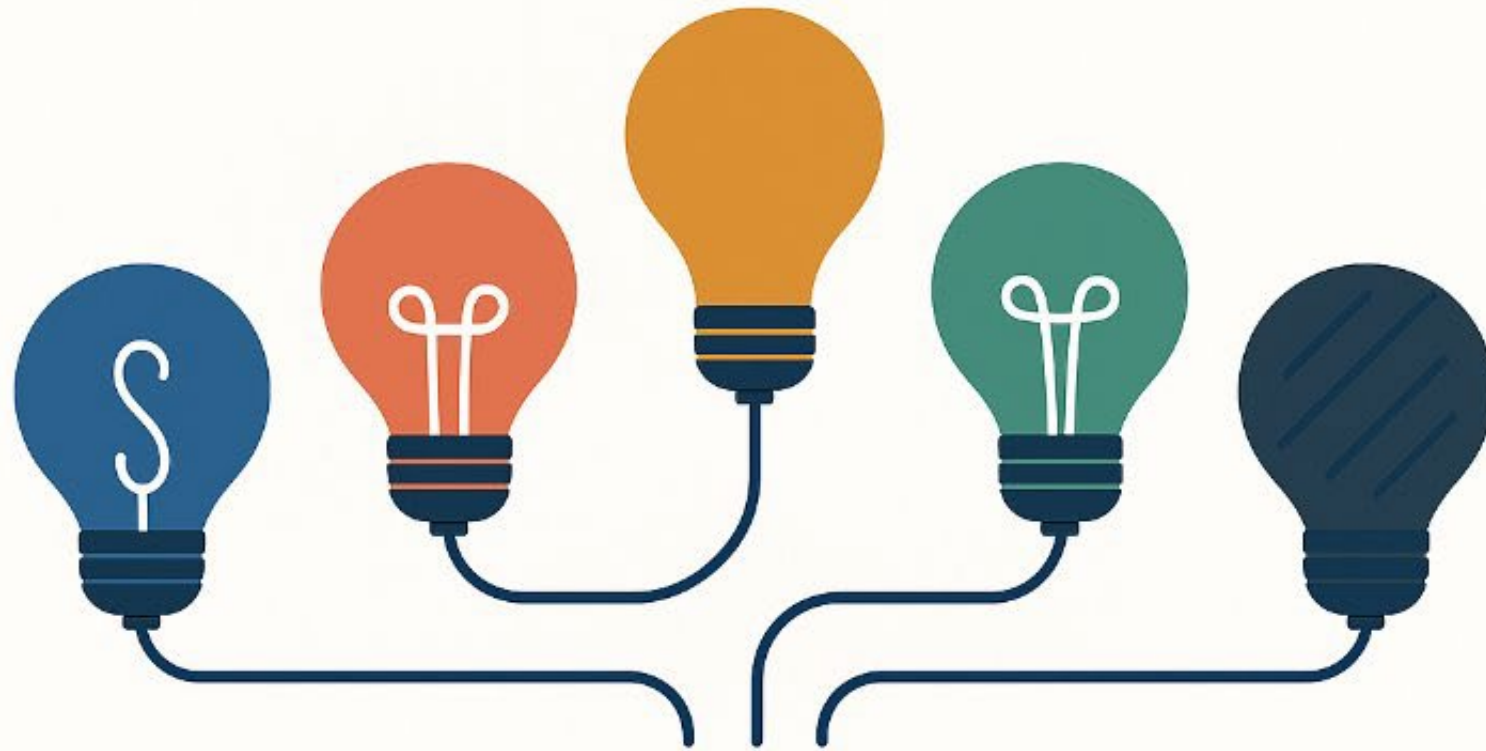


**Early  
Developmental  
Indicators**



**Potential  
Genetic  
Influences**


# Diverse Minds Create Transformative Innovations






# When Lack of Diversity Becomes Dangerous




 In the 1990s and early 2000s, crash test dummies were based on average adult men (5'10", 170 lbs)

 This meant airbags were not tested for women, elderly drivers, or children—leading to higher injury rates

 Women were 47% more likely to be seriously injured in crashes

 Result: Billions in redesigns, lawsuits, and retrofits for auto manufacturers

 Takeaway: Teams lacking diversity failed to anticipate real-world needs outside their own perspective



**When everyone on the team fits the crash dummy, everyone outside it is at risk!**



# Culture and Innovation: The Connection



- ✓ Psychological Safety → Idea Generation Thrives
- ✓ Empowerment & Autonomy → Creativity Unleashed
- ✓ Openness to Change → Faster Adaptation
- ✓ Cross-Functional Collaboration → Richer Innovation
- ✓ Leadership Example → Cultural Amplification
- ✓ Investment in People → Sustainable Innovation Engine

**“Culture isn’t just a factor —  
It’s the foundation for innovation.”**

# Compass Datacenters Innovation



- ◆ Continuous Improvement of People, Processes, Systems
  - Small, Incremental Improvements
  - Profoundly Simple
- ◆ Culture Tools: Thoughtful Innovation
  - Ask First, Ask Why, Five Whys
  - Business Value Lenses
- ◆ Humility In, Pride Out
  - Innovation Through Curiosity and Learning
  - Ego blocks Innovation; Humility Accelerates It
- ◆ Strong Ecosystem Collaboration
  - Diversity of Thought from Partners and Suppliers
  - Closely Coupled Partners
- ◆ Differentiation in Action
  - Product Selection, Design Decisions, Use of Technology, Means & Methods



# Innovate Influence Impact

May 15, 2025

## Innovation's Impact on an Ecosystem

Compass Builds Data Centers Differently



All Data Centers are Built Differently



Buildings are Built Differently



The World is a Better Place



# A word of caution.



# Providing Air Cover for Innovation (and especially innovators)



## What is Air Cover?

- Protection for innovators from internal resistance
- Early ideas need space to grow before being scrutinized

## Why It Matters

- Innovation threatens the status quo
- Without protection, ideas often die prematurely
- Innovators are targeted & criticized (seen as a threat)

## How Leaders Provide Air Cover

- Shield teams from premature criticism
- Celebrate experimentation and create psychological safety
- Encourage failure on the path to success

# The formula for change





# How Can I Become a Better Innovator?



- 🎨 Creativity Training
  - Practice divergent thinking and challenge your assumptions
- 🔧 Use Structured Tools
  - Apply frameworks like design thinking to guide innovation
- 🌍 Surround Yourself with Diversity in Perspective
  - Diverse teams push ideas further and uncover blind spots
- 🌱 Adopt a growth mindset
  - Embrace failure, iterate often, and stay curious



Innovation isn't a  
solo act – it's a  
teachable  
framework, a  
mindset...  
and it's a team  
sport!



# Thank You

# Questions & Challenges